

Some Memories Matthew Schlanger

ETC Memories, Art in General, NY (1997)

1977

Peer was showing tape and performing at the ETC on Court Street. I came home first and found my roommate and Holly trying to decide what to do next. I told them I was going to this place called the Experimental Television Center and invited them to come along. Once there my roommate started drinking the wine Peer had bought to go with the Brie and Swiss. My roommate was very good at drinking. To this day Peer complains to me about draining all his wine. Holly and I carried my roommate up the steps. I drove Holly home and she invited me to stay the night. I knew that evening that the TV Center was going to be an important part of my life.

1978

Neil Zusman came back from California and was around full time along with Rich Brewster, Sherry, Hank, David and Peer. A quote of Nam June's hung in the office and old TVs littered all the rooms. Ralph had converted the back darkroom into a small lab for the students. I was one of the students. Once or twice a week I would process images on a Paik-Abe. The windows on Court Street tended to dominate the imagery, as did various parts of my body.

1979

The TV Center moved to Owego. I spent a day or two helping with the move. I recall a day massaging the bricks with white paint. I'm sure Hank recalls more days doing the same. The mortar was loose so you had to lay the paint on thick to avoid pulling out too much sand. The new windows had a better view, on the river side, but I knew I would miss those tall Court Street windows.

1980

It was my girlfriend's birthday, but there was a Caps show at the Center. I felt bad but Maureen Turim finally showed up and I drove us to Owego. I was the only one who knew the way. Barbara Buchner was one of the recipients that year. She was at the show. I had always liked "Pictures of the Lost", I had seen it when she had just finished it back at Court Street. I had to pay when I got back home.

When I wasn't around video I was on my bike. It was this cheap Suzuki 2 stroke street bike. Sometimes Joan, sometimes Emily, and I would ride out to Owego to look at tapes. We always took the back roads instead of the highway. The road was usually a little damp. The trees and hills dominate my memory as much as the tape. Joan would hold me tight. At the center's library I would sit her down and segue between my favorites.

I couldn't get the access at the Center I needed but Ralph had managed to get the department to buy some processors with second level control. First just a Hern with no way to control it. I started studying analog and sound with Rich Brewster. He left the Center back in '78. I would drive my bike out to his father's house in Quaker Lake on a weekly basis. We sat in his room and at his kitchen table for hours. We pored over data sheets and schematics. He taught me about electricity and analog synthesis. I worked for months on a synthesizer. At first I soldered in 3 dimensional patterns which I later found out was a bad idea. I finished my first synth in the winter of '80. It was cold outside and we had the heat turned up high. Chuck had the TV on and was talking some shit about video not being a true art form like sculpture. I cranked up my synth for the first time.

1981

I graduated school and became a resident at the Center. I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how to use analog. I worked furiously. It was probably a good thing that I was denied access for so long. I did some good work as a student, but mostly I made shit. In one of my early sessions I had a minor epiphany. I couldn't deal with completing my masterpiece so I settled for solving smaller problems in smaller spaces. Anyway, I couldn't afford much stock and I knew patience was shrinking with the length of tapes of the previous decade. I tended to make short pieces. Shalom Gorewitz came upstairs as I was finishing one of my sessions. Residents would often arrive for their sessions early and would overlap for a day. Shalom told me that I had been given a Caps grant. It was my first grant. We talked about tape.

David invited me to join the Tuesday afternoon club. Peer, Barbara, and Mimi Martin and I would drive out to David's house in Barton every Tuesday. Neil had been working at Dolphin and during a strike was assaulted by a goon. He left the city and moved upstairs of David. We knit our circuits in David's Laboratory. All David's designs, all video. David had many ideas and was not able to test them all. We were the prototypers and built our systems in the process. David was great about being responsive to creating personal modifications to meet each of our personal needs.

1982 - 85

Anytime someone canceled a session, and at my regular intervals, I would pack up the car with my synths and drive from Binghamton to the Center for a couple of days. I learned not to do sequencing work until the final all-nighter since the flicker would create a burn that always left your eyeballs sunk a little deeper than they were intended. To do this to yourself too early in a session meant burning out too early. There was a feeling of immersion in a perfect world when working at ETC. Anyone writing about the Center will speak of the process of isolation within the space which transcends the hardware. The Center is not just about hardware, it is about a special kind of access. Stanley would refer to it as our temple. In his mind our isolation was the same as the ascetic's. My life was permeated with video images, tape, signals, chips and transistors.

Eventually I quit my job at the TV station and went to work full time at the Center. I was drafting circuit boards and building the new generation of hardware with David. I moved to Owego in the summer. Barbara and Peer helped me move in to Lake street across the hall from a simpleton the locals called Sarge. Both Peer and Barbara moved out of town by that winter. I lived there a year until the project was finished. Owego can be lonely. Some weeks I wouldn't talk to anyone for days. I pretended I was living in a village in France and was unable to speak the language. A great deal of work got done. I moved back to the city when my system was complete. I ate out every meal for a year. Owego needs a good restaurant.